

AGAINST SLEEP



AND NIGHTMARE #5

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Background

This is the seventh year publishing a magazine meant to change life.

I address the question of fundamentally changing our total conditions of living at a time when a vast structure works to conceal this question's existence. The magazine has had a good level of success considering this. I am part of a small, informal tendency sharing basically the same perspective (Glossary Of Terms for addresses). We encourage others with similar views to contact us.

But ASAN is still a one-person magazine. All the text in the magazine was written by me, although I've taken ideas from various collaborators. This comes mainly from differences in the energies of our small group. Almost everyone today is drawn in so many different direction by the ruling specialties of work, rent and consumption that we find it hard to coordinate even two or three people's activities.

This magazine is a kind of model or experiment. It is intended as an example of the kind of activity, analysis and intervention revolutionaries might soon do on a larger level. Naturally, some of the experiments have worked better than others.

ASAN is part of a debate on strategy among a very small group of revolutionaries. Within this milieu, there are those who call themselves "ultra-leftist," "council communist," "autonomist," "situationist-influenced," "class-war anarchist," or "left-communist."

ASAN is just as much written for anyone. As our present way of living becomes more and more impossible, the question of how we can create another way of living becomes more important but harder to address. This society has turned it's crisis against those who would oppose it.

Despite some big words, the ASAN is meant to be a simple-as-possible overview of how our side fares in the class war. We are not writing for any specialized group. We are not treating everyone the same out of guilt. Escaping elitist language is a way of harnessing the power of full human intelligence. And there simply is no elite today worthy of the name and any real change today will happen without such an elite.

ASAN's esthetics is a strategy. We combine theory and practice, the specialized and the general to point to the larger communist method. But we do not have any interest in artistic/esthetic ventures that seek to dissolve specialization while retaining capitalist/market relations.

I often use "we" in the magazine to refer to a larger group of sympathizers, because the magazine is intended to represent a political tendency rather than my personality, and because using "I" over and over again starts to sound grating.

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Recently

The themes of this issue focus on attacks on democracy and morality.

We will be treating "the zine revolution" in a purely opportunist way. If it allows greater communications with people who have a real practice, bravo. But we don't want get involved with people just because we're both sitting at a typewriter typing - I'm not automatically interested in other zines.

This magazine borrows tactics from the situationist international, the surrealists, and others. But artistic methods are just methods to me. I have no interest in being considered an artist.

Please *Do* contact me if you like the spirit of this zine. In the past, I have not always replied to letters in a timely manner. This was because of the weaknesses of my practice and not from any Situationist-inspired refusal to communicate. Hopefully, this has now changed, the magazine can become biannual and so on. We shall see.

The Empire Of Obscurity

The Rge Of Happiness

When a king reigned, he was recognized as ruler by all his vassals. Medieval kings might often reign supreme while not having as much true power as their dukes and duchesses. Today, it is easier to say which principles reign supreme than what are the ruling forces that govern our lives.

In this decade of "the end of the cold war," every known problem of the world has been solved. Yet unknown and unexplained problems constantly appear to wreck havoc on our existence. The peace dividend appears and vanishes without explanation. Wage inflation vanishes in America yet the federal reserve tells us we must suffer now for the ghost of future inflation. Israel and the PLO make peace to fight war against the Palestinian poor. The FMLN "revolutionaries" of El Salvador agree to become the police of El Salvador yet death-squads continue. An immense massacre happens without warning in Rwanda.

The world is more moral and more democratic than ever before. Mass murder is common, but it has never been more moral. More people are killed with fewer bad intentions than ever before. So fewer leaders are blamable for these deaths than ever before. From highways to unsafe factories to world-wide starvation, accidental death is the most justifiable kind of misery.

Every serious national liberation organization, union or Leninist party today

has sworn fealty to the world market. Every gang today is together as a gang. And every gang will accept the morality of gangland.

Morality has triumphed. World leader can truthfully shake their heads and say that this misery is just a sad by-product of our chosen way of life. Lloyds of London, the International Monetary

Evil" because there was an obvious cruel agent, the NAZI government, that killed many people and was semi-open about it. When Serbian/Yugoslav army commits mass murder and rape, it has the kindness to denounce the principles of cruelty and torture — everything can be chalked-up to the "normal" "horrors of war."

"Bad guys," "terrorists," and "Psychos" are still on the outskirts of social life to preserve the idea of those who kill on purpose. But good intentions reign supreme. "Holocaust revisionism" shows the changed tactics of state murders — even neo-NAZIS are willing to denounce the

messiness of open death camps by denying such a terrible thing could have happened.

Democracy and morality rule a world of lies not really meant to be believed. When the ATF federal police murder eighty five people in Waco, Texas, it is automatically "an accident," automatically a big effort is made to find "who's responsible for this mistake." We won't complain that no one was punished. Congress, of course, wasn't looking for the person who incinerated the Branch Davidians but for the

person who failed to incinerate them quietly.

Change What's Happened Lately

So what's happened lately? We could write about the post-modern quality of

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Fund and the international currency markets have done the service of taking death out of the hands of the evil leader. "Mass murder for the world market? I'm shocked, shocked..."

The Holocaust will "never again" happen. Thinkers of morality will be able to preserve it's unique quality of evil like a



rare etching to enhance the reputation of their nook in the academic world. And Schindler's list will glorify this last moment of evil forever.

The holocaust is disturbing Steven Spielberg, Hannah Arendt and the college moralists who write about "The Holocaust And The Dimensions Of

I REMEMBER YOU, MY PAL

ANDREA

CHARLENE

PAUL DECCRO

JANUARY 31, 1970 — APRIL 20, 1994

You will always be loved

"That means that there will be one less punk-rock girl walking around swinging her arms back and forth. It's really sad" Charlene on the murder of Mia Zapata, singer for the punk-rock band "The Gits."

Beautiful, excited about every part of life. Taking herself and her friends as utterly seriously as they deserved to be taken.

Knowing that every object should be free and taking it. Serious about words and thoughts and people and how to live and how to die. A voice that ranged from old woman to seducer to little girl. Vengeful and violent against those who attacked her friends or her. Pained by every compromise and all boredom and disrespect in this world. Alive and beyond any description or simple aphorism.

Smelly after not taking a bath for a couple days or not doing laundry "Woo-hoo punk-rock girl," "hoo, smelly

girl." "suckaa," Gracious and elegant and proud. Always backing up her friends.

Making judgments and deserving to make judgments. Alive in the crazy loneliness of the world of the dispossessed. Finding more worlds in a single moment with a gentle friend than a conformist could find in a lifetime.

Having no connections with sham emotionalism, with the canned Jim Morrison version of intense living. Having no intention to memorialize herself in representations of "on the edge living," she dealt with her impossible situation in a level-headed, reasonable way. The impossible situation was a world that would not allow her and her friends to live without working, without pay.



ing rent, without being harassed, without being cut apart by TV's myths of femininity, beauty and conformity. She dealt with life as it came up, never willing to let any threats of future retribution limit her power in the present.

Charlene liked the collage I did on the opposite page. I don't know what it meant to her. To me it represents how in this society the hidden sensuality of life - that this society represents as women - underlies the abstract dominant subject - that this society represents as man. I know Charlene would like to be remembered in something written, something that profoundly describes this society. I hope this is something and I say more than I usually would want to about it.

Once she was arrested and harassed by a pig in the police station. Her

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Strategies Of Despair

"...Just Cracked"

After failed real estate developer John Luigi Ferre murdered ten office workers and two lawyers in downtown San Francisco, inept San Francisco Mayor Frank Jordan was quoted as blurring out "maybe he just cracked."

Jordan's off-hand comment drew a stream of protests from relatives of the victim. They demanded a definitive line be drawn between "savagely killers" and the many ordinary people we instinctively sense are close enough to the edge to "crack" under pressure. "He didn't just crack, he went on a deliberate murderous rampage..." Complained one moralistic editorial.

But Jordan's comment rings true to these times. The competition, pace and ruthlessness of this society have increased to a point where many people are pushed to and off "the edge" in many ways. The labor market reduces wages till millions of families are forced into starvation and homelessness. Television atomizes people and distorts their sense of worth till they attack their partners or themselves. AIDS, drug resistant tuberculosis and hepatitis ravage people's

bodies. One Apple Computer Engineer kills himself and another suffers a nervous breakdown after the "Newton Personal Digital Assistant" fails to sell well. Kurt Cobain leaves a suicide note saying he "never be a really passionate performer" like Jim Morrison. US figure skating champion Tanya Harding pays to have a rival crippled. Presidential aide William Foster, one of the most powerful people in the country, kills himself over some bad press. The boundary between normalcy and utter despair seems thinner and thinner.

Strategies of despair appear when a society manages the direction of people who are going under entirely. It is the explosive knife-edge and dull throb underlying social action today.

By going under we mean losing hope of survival on the social level. According to his class and social concept, hateful real estate dealer Ferre couldn't continue living when his last deal brought him to negative worth. While failed capitalists are probably more blood-thirsty than un-

employed workers, the great mass of the despairing are working class people who

have suddenly lost all belief in the survival once guaranteed by this society.

This society's managers are still struggling to control the direction of the present despair. Naturally, they must put the spin on despair below the surface. The spectacle's hidden dialogue on despair is based on resentment. The movie "Falling Down" shows the correct direction and attitude for someone who "cracks." *Take revenge against other powerless people who offend you.* The hero was a middle class white who attacks poor more than rich and blames workers for the actions of their company. On the other hand, many workers today are ready to start joking about which bosses they'd go for if it ever came to it.

Capital's Game

One powerful weapon the rulers have against our forming a coherent strategy of despair is the different directions this society sends us in. The rotten-bourgeois protagonist of *The Fall* lauded the medieval torture device the *little-ease* as a harbinger of modern existence. The *little-ease* was just a very small room. The

prisoner was confined in this room that was both too small to stand-up in and too narrow to lie down in. Thus each prisoner had to assume half-way compromise positions — either straining their knee or their back or their neck. Starting from the little-ease, modern society has greatly expanded the directions you must twist yourself into to survive. The demands of a job, a family, social appearance, rent or mortgage payments, and the fear of crime or non-conformity each form walls cutting off the average workers' escape.

To get a little mental space within its little-ease, modern society offers resentment against others who have no real power. Janitors can resent those who do graffiti instead of those who pay them shit wages. Each cultural group is sold the resentment of those somehow below them. Whites and Asians are told to hate blacks. Blacks and whites are told to hate immigrants. Atomized men are sold sexist stereotypes and pornography.

In this way the slaughters in Bosnia and Rwanda are at the leading edge of capital's game. The spectacle recruits those who have nothing to lose but are still atomized to slaughter their neighbors. The spectacle gives these herds shallow pretexts now and the promise of slightly more later.

The proletariat is the class of people who collectively understand they have nothing to lose from the end of this society. The propaganda of today doesn't try

to give any false hope. It is happy to have a mass of individuals with the same desperation. As long as the desperate have

Some AFL-CIO union organizers have intervened in a wildcat strike. They argue that the strike should "accept the leadership of the most oppressed in society." Meanwhile, some workers are getting really sexist.



The result: both the unionists and the most sexist men get expelled

no collective consciousness, capital will win in the long-term.

On Roseanne, the father tells his son about masturbation. "Everybody does it but nobody talks about it." Bart Simpson makes critiques of this society informed by revolutionary political economy. But these must be translated into the choices

open to a single TV hero against the mass of society. So they are inherently recuperated into a dialogue of submission.

Escape

There are two directions you can go once life itself becomes impossible or pure pain. You can either deny your memory, power and existence. Or you can make your willingness to face pain and death into your power and pleasure. The first choice makes you controllable. The second choice makes you dangerous but still leaves the question of what to attack.

There are still opportunities for us to break out. To satisfy the world market, capital streamlined its controls. This gives it a chance to fail in a bigger way.

The LA riots showed a vague collective conscious as an enzyme that could corrode the entire social fabric of conformity. A vast horde of poor people would defy this society just because they knew they could.

The system still exists because *our time is out of joint*. Neither three days of riots in LA 92 nor two weeks of factory occupations in Paris in May 68 were long to think about a positive collective power. But our strategies have not yet been played out. The present times are creating both those who build slowly and those who act quickly.



Some Terms

Activism: militancy. The *ideology* of activity or organization for its own sake. The activist would moralistically argue that it's better to go on a march that will change nothing than to stay home and consider social reality. In the manner of the religious fanatic, the militant (syn) use constant activity as a way of repressing an awareness of their total social condition. "Sure you may have a theory about us never changing the system but at least we do something."

Can be a variety of *leftism*. Activist ideologists tend to spread the despairing counter-part ideology of *inactivism* - which equate any active intervention with militancy. Any sort of political action just inhibits people's autonomy and makes real change harder. Doing nothing is better."

Atomize: Originally, the smallest unit that matter could be divided up into. Market-place society atomizes people by dividing them into purely separate, comparable units. When people circulated from city to city or country to country merely to earn enough to survive, they are atomized strangers.

Capitalism: The present world system, that started with the European colonialization of the Americas and has expanded its reach to the entire world and every part of life. It is based on wage labor, exchange, and commodity production on a world scale. This system included the so-called Communist Bloc when it still existed.

Commodity: A product, anything bought and sold. A person's labor time can be bought by a capitalist and so their creative power becomes a commodity like sliced bread.

Communism: Not the system that once existed in Russia. A social system where human desires will replace exchange and profit as the moving force in society. Communism will be based on people directly controlling their creative activity.

Deficit: The difference between what the American government collects in taxes and what the government spends in various evil programs. Used by politicians to demand that workers give up wages, jobs and houses to appease their guilt. See also *Myth*.

Democracy: Any system where the majority shapes the decisions that the government makes. See *Permanent War, Permanent Elections*.

Detourn: (de tōrn) v. [situationists Fr *detour*, change of direction (fig) evasion, trick] to arrange disparate elements of the dominant culture together to form a new work, esp. in a way that reveals the true meaning and function of the original elements. Detournement as revolutionary activ-

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OJ Simpson's Ford Bronco ride, Tabloid TV or the latest invasion. But it is important to also look at what this domination of our attention means — OJ Simpson's ride was watched by 100 million people — the largest TV audience since the Gulf War was televised. *OJ Simpson's ride was news because it was news* — just as OJ was even more famous for being famous than for being a football star. To talk about how this society is really

changing, we need to not accept the news and not be news. There can be nothing really new while people go to work, come home and contem-

plate TV's atomized "sound-bytes." The latest invasion does matter. But the system of news is part of what lets Panama or Somalia or Haiti happen. The systematic murder of hundreds or thousands of people becomes interchangeable in American minds with the latest football scores.

This magazine is about how daily life is changing and how it can change. To talk about change, you have to talk about the incredible sameness of life today. This is our fifth issue in about seven years of publishing. Each time I have slightly rewritten each introduction from the previous issue. Each issue we attack the ideology of news, the idea that television's stream of empty facts is anything really new.



Counter Strategies

Of course spectators never reach the absolute zero of pure passivity. Just keeping track of the news is some activity. But all the powers-that-be need to have people remain *passive enough* not to take control.

Leftists, anti-deficit cranks and Jehovah's Witnesses all have an image of just convincing one person of their ideas,

then another and so on etc. They imagine potential converts not thinking at all until they can inoculated with the objective truth.

Mass media today plays for the total mood of each moment. They change their stories enough to keep people interested. They accept real, unconscious intelligences working but only so they can keep them unaware. They try to get people to not expect Clinton to increase wages but not to have complete enough

despair to take independent action. For each decrease in the standard of living, they give workers a new, differently packaged scapegoat for their misery. (Drug dealers, youth gangs,

child molesters, and immigrants have all had their day).

The rhetoric of unbiased information is part of the ideology of news. But the media itself has already gone beyond the ideology of *unbiased information*. The media navigates the tide of popular misery and obsession. Where the *Worker's Vanguard* wants to educate the masses, *Time* wants the spectator's playful, cynical participation in their own alienation. The media thus recognizes feelings and subjective reactions as being as important as "facts."

The rulers of this society see a danger in themselves that the average person does not. Since a fluid situation must be managed, there is always a chance of the pot boiling over.

We move into the opposite extreme position beyond the media. We use both the subjective and the objective. Leftists don't admit that workers' resist work. We know that people resist work and we push resistance to become unified and total. Leftists say that the poor only loot because they are desperate. We look for looting to be unified as a mass potlatch to destroy the economy.

Instead of filling our magazine with facts designed to convince a passive "un-

Can't we all get along?

LITTLE DOGGIE
Rodney King

Billboard graffiti
in Los Angeles

biased" observer, this magazine contains series of strategies for fellow travellers. It assumes that the reader is engaged in counter-flow to the general flow of submission and passivity in this society. We describe a series of conceptual leaps, hoping that the reader has already made some and intending to fill in the rest.

Our Obscurity

Every racket of this society uses plausible deniability.

One force holding together an authoritarian state is confusion. No one knows exactly who is a rat and who is cool — who really swallows the bullshit and who just plays along.

As long as our class struggle remains defensive, obscurity will be part of the strategy of the dispossessed. One defensive strategy today is hip language. This patter can show defiance to those in the know and hide it from authorities. To escape being pinned-down, oppositional language constantly mutates, parts vanish and reappear, and much is left indefinite.

Gangsta Rap is the most visible place for rebels to create this language. Gangsta Rap is ultra-rebellious and ultra-conformist. It is sung by cop-killers and cops. In places, the most extreme resisters of this society put rebellion forward in terms of "Fuck The Police" (By NWA). But this rebellion is broken up by every sort of consumerism from violent sex to fast cars to petty hatred.

Of course we can't chart the bounds of this under-ground sea. Our obscurity is part of the total sea of obscurity today. We can say that since rebellion takes obscure forms, it is especially critical to be clear about how to reach our goal — what to do when we change from fighting from a position of weakness to fighting from a position of strength. We can also take comfort that if an explosion is taking shape, it may stay invisible until it happens.

The River Of Lies
The Painted Bird

As this society adds a moral gloss to all the old systems, it has only automated all the repression of each previous patriarchal or empire society. That sexual harassment in the work place, racism, sexual assault on children and rape have increased long after "our society emerged from superstition." Hatred of those who are even slightly different is not more irrational than the continuation of this system itself. Superstition, panic and hatred of all that is different are natural counter-parts of "normal life." At the same time that the global merchandising system gives formal equality to every woman, the largest single marketing tool remains the glorification of stereotypical adolescent-boy experience. The pseudo-privileged of society have lost ground along with the more oppressed groups. When they react in a t o m i z e d

ways, the rigid character that once supported official patriarchal society are instead routed towards fraternity-boy style attacks on women, queers, ethnic minorities and everyone outside the official norm.

Conspiracy

The rule of democracy is also the rule of rumors, a constant muttering going from the center off to the shadows. The media is a vast spectrum ranging from The History Of D-Day to Clinton Talks To Space Alien. Scientific announcements are made for TV and the TV becomes a scientific authority.

When so many crazy ideas are believed today, conspiracy is more plausible. Not that many people believing these ideas makes them likely. But because mass hysteria leaves people open to being

ity reverses the systematic fragmentation of specialists - *re-exent* (-ma) the act of detouring

Exchange: giving something of equal value in return for someone giving you an object. The more this sort of apparently simple act dominates the world, the more each person is a purely atomized unit and the more community cannot exist.

Ideology: The thought of power - ideas in the service of power. Ideology is frozen thought but not all frozen thoughts are ideology. The *ideologist* develops empty rhetoric whose real appeal is to a person's unstated (and often unconscious) interest in maintaining their immediate material conditions - their part in capitalism. When a subjectivist ideologist says "all that matters is immediate pleasure," their rhetoric might be appealing to a student because it would justify their vapid, parasitic existence. "Everyone's got to work, it's only fair" might make those forced to work 60 hour weeks feel slightly better.

The Left: The left wing of capitalism. Historically, those involved in the political system who wished to move closer to "socialism." As the political

system has become more of a conveyor belt for the capitalist system, leftists have become spokes-people for the most bureaucratic forms of capitalism. Leftist have in mind the interests of welfare workers, teachers, prison reformer and professional "facilitators." Leftists range from liberal who want a government that takes care of people better to

Leninist of various stripes who still imagine the recreation of a soviet-style welfare-state dictatorship.

Morality: See *Against Capital And Morality*

Myth: a magical story is used to give meaning to the lives of people in a culture. The story of Adam and Eve was a Christian myth. "Anyone can work their way to the top," "America was founded on traditional values," "We have to work twice as hard to pay off the deficit" are modern American myths. Myths dominate people when they are alienated from their lives by wage labor.

The Nation: a mythical community supposedly consisting of "people living in the same general location, speaking the same language and having



the same general culture." This myth was used to create capitalist governments by the national entrepreneurs of first the US and France and then every region of the developing capitalist world. Since there is no part of the entire world with a homogeneous culture, nationalist ideology is really used to unify people against those who are different. America was founded on murdering native peoples and continues to base itself on racism.

Oppression: Being persecuted or subjugated by an unjust force. All specialist of power focus on the unfairness of particular oppressions without admitting the total misery of this society. The manipulators of the most conservative talk of "crime," high middle-class taxes, and inflation. The left talks of racism, sexism, homophobia and classism. But all the specializing of misery makes it harder to understand the total misery of this society.

Privilege: A special immunity, right, or benefit enjoyed by an individual. This society grants a vast array of apparent privileges: home-ownership, whiteness, American Express Membership, maleness, or citizenship. But every "carrot" is only a chance to participate more in the economy or to avoid the social terror of today. Virtually no one gets *real privilege* from being a part of this society.

Right: As capital has carved new social relations, the powers that people had kept by using these informal groups has disappeared into formal rights ostensibly granted by a higher power. As the market economy is perfected, rights become simply an abstract form of private property.

Role: an interchangeable act that is offered for each person to take up at any given circumstance but is expected to be discarded just as easily. When we are at the mall, we must be consumers, at a cafe we be intellectuals. At work, we are expected to be happy.

Recuperate: (re cu'par at) v. [situationist Fr *recuperer* to retrieve] to put spontaneous or revolutionary elements back into the language of the dominant culture and thereby trivialize them and negate their creative or revolutionary power - *Coopt, n. -ation* (a-shun) the act of recuperating.

herded by well-placed insiders. When a river of false belief is flowing quickly, it is inevitable that certain people will take advantage of the direction it is flowing in. Was AIDS a conspiracy or were people able to take advantage of the direction the epidemic went in?

The commonness of conspiracy theories often comes from their inability to be proven false. As the idea of conspiracy gets more credible, mainstream media types repackage open events as conspiracies to make them more interesting. "The secret alliance of Reagan and the pope to over-throw communism" is sold when that the president and the pope had always been the most open crusaders against communism.

The real condition of life today is both

one with the "best" (most conformist) attitude. The actual skills of the applicant are seldom tested. The applicant is usually hired on the spot or occasionally called back. If the applicant does not fit the interviewers' criteria, they are simply never called back. No rejection notice is ever handed out.

For larger companies or more skilled employees, the system is similar but more elaborate. A company puts an ad in the local paper. It will usually receive hundreds or thousands of resumes. Often all of the resumes are ignored and a friend of the boss is hired. Sometimes many interviews are done but they are not more objective than the pizza joint owners' chat at the counter.

This system is like a blanket of obscurity for the job seeker.

They have no certain information about the availability of jobs, the requirements for getting them or the likelihood of being hired. For the employer, employees are like air, they need only inhale, and one appears that at least says that he or she fits their qualifications.

What does this say about the conditions of power and the economy today? The

economy generates no set information but only a desperate sea of orders, rumors and fables. Since everything is uncertain, the desperate worker must constantly move in the direction that seems least likely to destroy them.

But when you move in the direction that protects you the most, it's hard to see any bigger picture.

Participation

So today we have more passivity than ever before and more participation in power than ever before. This is not a contradiction — people participate in the market and are passive in the way they expend their creative energy.



pre-meditated and unconscious. Everyone is expected to be their own spin doctor.

The Empire Of Obscurity

The fog of the empire of obscurity is quite dense in the "world of work." From the lowest levels to the highest levels, companies have few set rules for hiring. In a small retail outlet, there is effectively no procedure at all. Applications are taken constantly but the people who apply are only given interviews if the shop is hiring. If the shop isn't hiring, the applications are thrown away without comment. If the shop is hiring, the applicant talks to the manager. The interviewer takes stock of the attitude and appearance of the applicant and hires the

The world market has mastered the preemptive strike against possible working class demands — it's newest weapon is the preemptive organization of society — the decentralized production of preemptive attacks on an ad-hoc basis — talk radio.

More-over, the managers of the world market see that popular mood in capitalist society fluctuates wildly. The media energetically manipulates both the beliefs and the mood of the majority.

It is well known among news people that, if a particularly grisly crime is widely reported in the newspaper or on TV, it will likely be repeated by some impressionable person quite soon (this won't go on forever only because that kind of crime will lose its novelty).



Franix

For the average person, the month of revolts two years ago when LA exploded in flames and several other cities had large riots might have been fifty years ago. But this is a symptom of the totalitarian rule of mood — the present moment overwhelms any the memory of yesterday. And it shows in the end that things are really unstable, ready burst apart given the right circumstances.

The past is not remembered but constructed as a part of the present — the image of "the sixties," "the eighties" overwhelms any reliable knowledge most people have of those times.

The total unity of this system is concealed only by its hiding any possibility of change. Many, many people are angry and desperate in today's America. But relatively few people would describe an entire system as their enemy. We let our confusion be fed back in the form of empty choices.

This shows the strength and weaknesses of the largest urban insurrection of the last twenty years. The LA riots showed that a vast number of people had no loyalty to consumer society and felt fucked over in many ways. But it showed little in the way of a counter power to the power of the state.

We are trying to create new ways of living. But to do this we recognize that almost every way of acting that today says that it is new and different is really an intensification of the old.

This society has brought up a vast sea of possibilities. It heralds new ways of living, communicating, and relating. But it mainly brings up the possibilities to crush us with them. When the vast majority remain spectators, avant guard art, encounter groups, and other explorations remain experiments in ways that capital can advance its domination.

The misery of vanishing possibilities can be seen in our milieu. Informal city dwellers, work resisters, runaways, we could be almost a family. This almost is the pain of modern existence. There is a leakage of trust — each person loses a bit with multiple loyalties and pressures.

How can we think about this life? Things are hurdling along faster than any of the easy explanations can ever describe them. Indeed, you are close to our view if you think that all the easy answers are part of the system that is moving us closer to ruin.

We are neither mindless activists of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) variety nor pure subjectivists of the Va-neigemist variety.

The force that appears must rediscover activity — creative action without compulsion. But in a frozen world not yet shattered, our actions can only be building for a situation that now seems impossible — that is against the logic of now.

Language

We use language as a sword, not a shield. At one point we might talk about "people acting for themselves." But we expect the reader to figure out this means impoverished people creating a new world, not yuppies going shopping. *The meaning of each word depends on the context of the article, the magazine and this society.* Our words are not axiomatically defined formulas but fluid responses to changing conditions of the social maelstrom. They aim to be accurately chosen blows against the current conditions.

Specialist: one who studies, works with, and by extension tries to own any single category of knowledge; *an expert.* A biologist is a specialist on animals. A manager is a specialist at giving people orders. A political consultant is a specialist at manipulating the passive opinions of voters. Ralph Nader is a specialist on consumer rights. Ronald Reagan, *the great communicator*, was considered an expert at communicating the orders of the government to the population.

As this society reduces life to a machine-like order, its rulers become bureaucrats/specialists who operate interchangeably in the corporate, governmental or university bureaucracies. *All specialists become specialists in ideology.* The ruling bureaucrats thus generically manipulate people, information, and rhetoric according to the economy's orders. A logging company president becomes the California State Universities president and then could conceivably become a politician. Jerry Brown began as a Jesuit, became governor of California, then was the left-wing cameo presidential candidate and now is a radio talk-show host.

Specialize, Specialization:

Spectacle: (Spek tī kul) n. [situationist Fr *Spéctacle* show, movie, play etc.] A fusion of form and appearance. A form of accumulation under late, declining capitalism. See also *A Short Critique of the Situationist International*.

Star: Any arbitrary focus of spectacular attention.

The System: A vague term that became popular in the sixties and seventies. The know-it-alls of today attack this vagueness because the vague can still be useful. It's true that talking about the system makes it harder to blame any one person or group. But the term system speaks to the instinctive feeling people have that all the apparently unrelated parts of this society form a single whole.

Big talkers of one sort or another naturally attack the idea that TV stars, politicians, corporate managers, college professors and the big talkers form a single, invisible class of ruling experts.

Terrorism: The use of bombs, armed attacks, fear and secret cells to wage *conventional warfare* against an existing state. Terrorist ideology always winds up using the methods of the

capitalist state; the specialization of power and a population that is kept passive spectators. And the terrorist group generally aims to recreate a new capitalist state on the basis of "national liberation." (see nationalism)

Union: An organization that acts as a broker between labor and capital. Thus, any organization

organized to explicitly accept the conditions of this society while ostensibly demanding more. It is no surprise that unions act against the working class.

Wage labor: when a person sells their activity for money. This seemingly simple operation is the basis of our society's power, growth and decay. One person paying another to work is an apparently simple relationship that hides how the workers' own power to create becomes something that confronts them as a commodity, something external, outside their control.

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The Poor, The Bad, And The Angry, POBox 3305 Oakland, CA, 94609 - NOTE NEW ADDRESS!

Radical Chains BM Radical Chains, WC1N 3XX, UK

Wildcat, BM Cat, London WC1N 3XX, UK

Destroying the democratic spirit means refusing the smallness, the flatness of this world as well as the illusions and manipulations of this world. This society provokes a need for judgment — to evaluate its situation in definitive manner. Absolute certainty of right and wrong is characteristic of those who will greatly. It is the opposite of morality because it says "my good is my good and I do not care if anyone else has it." Great wants, great mistakes, great hungers, and great judgments are what the dispossessed lack as much as food, clothing and shelter.

Certainly, this is a society whose judgment on itself has been read and is subconsciously known by all. From the old socialist movements to the situationists, the path to a different world is known and not taken. Our language and our practice aims to be self-conscious of our existence as process. Social existence is constantly changing, even if in today's world it always returns to the same small area.

The context of each article depends on the historic context of the dispossessed. We aim to create new possibilities but naturally must begin with some of the same old words that capitalism uses to destroy all thought of anything new. This is just as when partisans begin armed with fewer weapons than a regular army.

We can add the entire context of the dispossessed only by cleverly thrusting forward our assumptions. Thus we expect the reader, our ally, to make assumptions with us, to build up an understanding of our new methods from words that start out seeming old.

This is not an axiomatic system that proves that we will succeed, but nei-

ther is our effort a matter of pure rhetoric.

This method is chancy and we must take responsibility for our tactics. Words do not have any meaning we wish but only the meanings we manage to give them. We attack morality but will use good and bad as short-hand for what we want. We attack democracy but do not aim for the common opposite — "dictatorship."

None of the specialized thinking produced by this current system has any universality. All ahistorical thought, from mainstream art, science, and philosophy, to leftism, anarchism, anti-technology thinking, deconstruction or mysticism, is utterly dependent on its unexamined point of origin. It will fade even before dialectics, the thought which knows it depends specifically on the current period of capitalism.

Origins And National Liberation

In this issue we will focus our attack on morality and democracy. This is a strategy against capitalist relations in total.

This magazine has a similar project to Marx and the various communist-influenced

thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We more or less accept the "left-communist" program of internationalist struggle against unions, nationalism, the left and parliamentarianism. The left communist approach arose around 1917-37 as capital intensified and perfected these control systems masquerading as autonomous workers' movements.

But the make-up of capitalist society is constantly changing. We are against unionists and Leninists — the old enemies of the working class. But at the moment this sort of enemy of the working class seems to have dissolved into a wider, more modern spectrum of enemies of the working class. The Leninist is just one kind of leftist. The unionist can be a bureaucrat, a specialist, a moralist, a social worker and/or a good democrat depending on how radical a posture he or she takes.

The national liberationist today are the only "classical" enemy that seems to have still have separate power outside that general leftist/bureaucrat mush. The difference now is that national liberation can parade as radical while simultaneously refusing to challenge capital.



"Forging a national identity" is the favorite venture of today's nationalist entrepreneurs. The creation of a new set of common myths is at the center of these wicked schemes. Such an endeavor is both a modern application of capitalism's practical psychology and a call to maintain the hide-bound traditions in a streamlined form. Each new identity stays as rigid as the posture of its self-unaware adherents.

This unity of all gangs has been subjectively visible for year to all who cared to look. The high level of cooperation today comes as capital winds up the pressure one more notch. In today's gangland, the production of misery is being infinitely streamlined.

Continued from page 28

8 The explosion point after May 68.

The weaknesses of the SI became most glaring in their effort to adapt to the post-May 68 circumstances of vague revolutionary ferment and spectacular interest in their activities. In response to the new circumstances, rather than modify their dualistic theory of control/subjectivity, the major SI theorist intensified the focus of their theory on subjectivity.

After May 68, a number of situationist-influenced groups appeared in scattered locations around the world. All of them and the SI broke-up in a few years from orgies of intense subjectivist criticism/self-criticism.

The Real Split In The International (by Debord and Sanguinetti) illustrates the SI's escalating demands for subjectivity. The SI is expected to break up in order to "re-appear everywhere." But to overcome the SI historical impasse, new revolutionaries must achieve a theory that can "be fired point-blank" at their enemies. This was simply a call for an explosion point of subjectivist ideology. The SI's intensified subjectivism had as its counter-part a rigidified idea of practice. Dualism closed the door on ever going beyond the SI's previous assault on the spectacle. To criticize or rearrange the direct relationship between subjectivity and theoretical clarity would damage the reputation of the situationist May 68 assault on capital.

Since the SI couldn't go forwards in looking at the events, it went backwards. Once the spectacle had been breached, the "old workers movement" was expected to reconstitute itself along with councils to defend against Bolshevik manipulators.

"When the workers are able to assemble freely and without mediations to discuss their real problems, the state begins to dissolve." (*The Real Split*, p.33, quoted by Barrot)

Thus *The Real Split* engages in shameless workerism. It claims that absolutely only those cadre thrown out of the university were capable of revolutionary positions. (The SI itself had few, if any, members in the factories.)

On the other hand, only the cadre (professional class) would take an autonomous theoretical practice similar

to the SI. And it would be bad. These "pro-situationists" were described as now the most immediate enemy.

The "pro-situationist" groups were only able to become parody versions of the SI for the same reason the SI was not able to overcome its theory. The anti-militant had to demand always more individual self-realization. (Jean Baudrillard and the present day anti-civilization line uses this intensification of moral radicalism as their main weapon. It takes a Situationist style bend in its reasoning and goes from the insight that primitive people lived well to saying that the subjective effects of modern society - technology etc, can be rejected in a subjective revolutionary leap.)

9 Their Use

The situationist myth of heroic subjectivism and related ideologies (which can't be wholly separated from the SI's practice) are the single biggest obstacle a revolutionary might inherit from the SI. Once rejected, the particulars of situationist theory are free for looting by revolutionary theorists.

To critique this society's structures is quite useful during a period of stasis - when this society is not changing - square zero of revolution. But this is also the period when revolutionaries proportionately have little influence. The most important period for revolutionaries is the dynamic period - square one, two and three of the social struggle. This is where structuralist critiques fall down.

The critique of democracy we engage in, for example, is also a structuralist critique. But our critique makes democracy's foundation upon wage clear.

The SI's tactics and observations are useful to revolutionaries. They are most useful as approximations to the conditions of the society. The spectacle may be a useful word but cannot be theorized as having an autonomous dynamic.

ASAN, Wildcat and other "anti-democratic communists" may describe democracy as if it has a trajectory separate from capitalism as a whole. But this is a simplification; capital as a whole is the process and democracy is only a sub-process that can only be partially independent. Capital is not influenced by democracy - rather democracy is a part of capital.

The SI's tactics are useful but cannot be taken as magic. Like the SI, ASAN attempts to address this society as close to "point-blank" as possible. Unlike the SI, ASAN does not expect this distance to linearly decrease in proportion to our theoretical development.

Revolutionaries must also make communism's relation to the material basis of capitalism clear. This involves debates along these particular lines. The SI's reduction of capital's dynamics to the dynamics of its appearances makes this sort of debate impossible. Keeping alive a discussion of political economy is also critical for understanding the whole dynamic of this society.

10 Notes

A morality of the subjectivism became the last remnant of pure situationist theory. It was at the heart of the self-extinguishing attempts to "go beyond the SI" made by the SI and its imitators.

To go against this malign attitude, we mention that Jean Barrot's *Critique Of The SI* is excellent. The present critique was not modelled on Barrot's piece but we agree with his basic points. The critique of subjectivism offered by the post-SI journal *Implications* is excellent although the journal as a whole remains within a moral hierarchy of subjectivist/autonomist prestige inherited from the SI.

Some Retractions

"The LA riots will change everything..."

"Our program consists of directly democratic workers councils taking over all of life."

This magazine started using a good deal of the ultra-democratic, ultra-spontaneousist ideology of the SI. What we hope is a wider approach to activity is summarized above. Here we retract some of this SI inspired rhetoric.

We wound-up using the mechanical formula that the LA riots would change everything just as the SI believed that a single break with tradition put things on utterly new ground. The rulers of this society continue to succeed almost completely on the level of preventing people from seeing any alternative way of living. After the riots, they have sought to continue this advantage through as many active measures as possible. The elections sought to extract the greatest amount of involvement and support from the working class with the least effort. Efforts to bring a larger turnout were somewhat successful.

We conditionally retract any previous statement like "all people have to do is start thinking for themselves and then dissent can really start" or "the new society will be based on workers councils running everything." These statements give an easy description of the future using democratic mythology: the idea that people simply clumping into an undifferentiated mass will automatically escape the control of this society. People always think for themselves - there is no one who can literally do their thinking for them. The expression "not thinking for yourself" usually means that people accept a pre-packaged form of ideas. But we can do equally well saying that.

This isn't saying that the extreme democracy that dominated the thinking of, say, the revolutionaries of May 68 in Paris made them the enemy. The most important thing is to criticize allies when they are confused. When the revolutionaries of Paris put their positions in self-management-ist rather than anti-economic terms, they created road-blocks for themselves at different moments. When certain workers took over certain factories in Algeria and were running them in parallel to the official economy, they still hadn't over-thrown the economy and contrary to the SI weren't automatically a vanguard.

We also began much closer to a vanguard for the realization and suppression of art.

None of these retractions should be confused with the common pattern of rejecting "extremism" in favor of a "balanced view" of society, the left etc. We are absolutely extremist and elitist in the slave-morality terms of this society. That is simply saying that our opinions are far from the totalitarian "mainstream" imposed by this society and we intend to act on our opinions.

The Specter of Democracy



...And Democracy Continues Its March

"Fetters and headmen were the coarse instruments which tyranny formerly employed; but the civilization of our age has perfected despotism itself, though it seemed to have nothing to learn." *de Tocqueville, Democracy In America (pg.97)*

America really is entering a period of greater democracy. Bill Clinton's election campaign has never stopped. Polls are still being taken about his latest struggles. From the New Hampshire primary to the health care reform campaign, TV has tried to draw us into his endless fights with other mighty bureaucrats — from George Bush to Robert Dole to Saddam Hussein. Even more, we are expected to cheer Clinton in fights against us. "How well do you think that Clinton succeeded in communicating the

need for sacrifice to the American people."

The 1992 elections had the biggest turnout of a presidential election in twenty years. From elections to polls to talk-radio to the "internet," never has the average citizen had so many chances for a voice in their government. But this hasn't helped the hapless citizen. The average, passive voter probably is poorer and has less control over his or her life than ever before.

To understand how people lose this game, we have to look at how the game is really played.

In pro basketball, fouling is part of the game. Some teams play with a little more finesse, other use a little more brute strength. The honest fan doesn't look down on the player who fouls, only the player who gets caught. So the player is

allowed to do anything — except to question the real rules of the game. If Kurt Rambis (a "physical player" from a few years back) said at a press conference "Yes, I intend to foul people, that's my job," he could be expelled from the league.

American Democracy works the same way. If we play the game, we can question everything except the real rules of the game. But here the game is something that dominates our lives.

The game today is exchange. It dominates our daily lives when we must exchange our time at work for our survival. It dominates the world system when the electronic world market allocates all resources by exchange.

Poll takers constantly ask about OJ Simpson's murder trial, the best way to make America more productive or how

to keep children off drugs. But answering these sorts of questions only makes people think more in terms of life continuing exactly as it is now. The pollsters' slave questions talk only about how this society should best be run. They assume that everyone will live in nuclear family, go to work, work really hard for low pay, come home and look at a TV star on the moving screen.

The Illusion

We attack democracy as such, we don't want "real democracy" instead of "fake democracy." Today's system of vacuum-packed choices is the flip-side of the market perfecting itself.

The progress of exchange, of capital, is also the creation of capital's own model of thinking.

All forms of democratic ideology appeal to a model of human behavior that implies each person is wholly separate social agent who only affects others in fixed, definable ways. Perfect democracy — constant polling, an almost permanent election campaign — merely weighs each impulse in the market place of ideas.

Democracy is the language of "common sense" in a world where capitalism controls people's senses. It defends the right, for example, for a man to shout cat-calls at a woman because that man's actions are simply "free speech" not connected to any social action.

Today's democracy never has to attack its true enemies but only phantasms within itself. It is only the exchange of one sort of rhetoric for another. So all rhetoric of this sort is empty because is only used to shout at another. Most voters vote for the candidate they think will win instead of the candidate they agree with. This is logical. Why should they care? Everyone knows that things will remain about the same no matter what they do. So why not support a winner instead of a loser? No one cares that politicians lie. They care if the politician

gets caught lying. This proves the politician is weak and so a loser.

If you make a choice passively, someone could just as well act on your choice



without you having to do anything. Of course presidential elections are only held every four years but if Clinton responds to each month's polls, the government truly hears the passive "voice of the people."

"Would you like me to shoot you now or wait till I get home?" Elmer Fudd to Daffy Duck. "Should the federal government cut services or raise taxes?" Bill Clinton to the working class.

Of course all the choices the media serves up to us have hidden clauses that change their apparent meaning. The federal government reduces its entire budget. Then the local puppets frame the choice of cuts for local voters. These voters then get to support one austerity measure or another.

But this is because the marketplace of ideas works against us. But is this because this market is unfair? No! Even a fair marketplace of ideas simply decides the best direction for capital. Our disadvantage in talk-show dialogues is the same as our disadvantage compared to employers or banks.

Why Democracy Now?

"We must learn to make the process of governing as entertaining as we have learned to make [electoral] politics entertaining."

Max Frankel, Editor, The New York Times

The game of letting the ruled participate in their own exploitation not new. The present subtle switch from George Bush's upper-class style to Bill Clinton's

democratic style is a counter-part to the rise of the mega-capitalists. The eighties ended with stock market crashes that heralded the end of junk bonds as a strategy for total capital to expand. The economy could no longer be artificially expanded by the easy-money financial manipulations of Michael Milken, George Bush, Paul Volker and Company.

Instead of artificially expanding, it is now

sucking all resources into its empty center. The faction of capitalists at the very top are the billionaires — financiers like Adnan Khoshaggi, entrepreneurs like Bill Gates and a host of invisible characters. This small group had their wealth and power tremendously increased by the expansion of financial manipulations and electronic world markets. Currency and "derivative" speculation had expanded until today they involve trillions of dollars changing hands on a weekly basis. This game uses and expands the power of this ultra-rich class.

As today's crisis system moves to marshal every possible force in its defense, uses our choices about how best to be exploited against us. This system is the dictatorship of the commodity, the world market and of the billionaires. But simultaneously it is the rule of democracy. Once all action and every person can be translated into empty choices, those choices can be exchanged with each other like dollars or spectacular images.

If people are given a free choice about how to sell themselves to the world market, then the system in total will run much more smoothly. When commentators say "let the public decide the best health plan" they mean let people find a plan that gives the insurance companies the highest premiums that workers can

pay and still survive on. Managers will give people free-reign to decide which way to sell themselves to the market.

Democracy became the dominant ideology right after "tight-money"/slow growth became the main economic policy. Tight money reigned in financial speculation and began the present system of reorganization-terror. It goaded lower-level capitalists to produce more without spending more. This caused corporations to attack both workers and the previously ignored level of middle-management.

The financial capitalists' power depends on the expansion of an abstract chunk of money. So democracy is an ideal strategy. The financial capitalist don't care whether they invest in defense contracting, prisons, computers to track drug-offenders, or for-profit hospitals.

Thus the ruling party switched from the party of corruption — the republicans under Bush, to the party of participation — the Democrats under Clinton. But naturally democracy implies many more switches after this.



Historical Democracy

As capitalism has developed, democracy was held back by local authoritarians and by the capitalist's fear that the idea of democracy would make people ungovernable.

Now that capital has perfected democratic participation, all previous forms of capitalism can be seen as instances of democracy. It is thus not surprising that democratic think-tanks are able to give good advice to dictatorships like Pinochet's Chile. It is not surprising that Hitler came to power through the democratic operations of the Weimar republic. (There was some cheating but we already know cheating is part of any game.)

Democracy is now the ideal dialogue of capital. Participation in this process is speaking the language of the market whether it is participatory, authoritarian or technical. The methods of military "psy-war" propaganda are the methods of the modern democratic political cam-

paign are the methods of modern government are the methods of leftists discussing ways to improve the system. The enemy is isolated, personalized and attacked using claims that are most likely to get automatic reactions from the isolated spectator.

Every apparent rebellion that failed, every useless exercise of freedom, reappears in the accounting of capital. The system of the Soviet Union was identical to the system of war-time production in our "free-market" system. Thus the final end of the Soviet Union has given the extended insurance system a quantitative measure of state-capitalism versus private enterprise.

The more people relate on the level of "pure democracy," the more they relate on the level of abstract, formal equality. And the more they have an incentive to solve the system's problems. Everyone becomes a bureaucrat versus everyone else. Everyone is equal as long as they each play the same role. We are all equal as consumers, voters, TV watchers, or citizens. That is, we can all be exchanged in our functions.

To write a letter to a congressman is to enter into a huge system of data-creation that ultimately makes people less powerful. The ultimate passivity of a permitted, experimentally controlled role makes it predictable.

The stock market, the media consultants, the political think-tanks, the pollsters, the market researchers, and the big charities constitute an immense electronic memory bank and simulation of all the permitted choices that "consumers," "the public," the spectators, the passive make. The election industry speculates about each way that each given choice is framed and then creates strategies for extracting maximum profits from each citizen's choice.

With this automation of control, democratic regimes are now the most cost effective. This is part of today's intensification of democracy. Once ideology sees formal democracy in all acts of government, cost accounting demands that redundant local tyrants be removed. Even in backward areas like

Haiti or Somalia, capital moves to replace local butchery with the "accidental" mass murders of democracy.



Decisions?

Revolutionaries oppose every version of democratic ideology. On one hand, after a revolution there won't be a need to fixate on the process of reaching each decision. For example, one person could decide a day's delivery schedule in a communal warehouse without oppressing the other workers. Other workers might prefer to spend their time walking on the beach than double checking each decision. The dispatcher would have no coercive power over the other participants in the warehouse. Deciding the schedule would not give her entrenched privilege that she could accumulate and exchanged for other things. For their own enjoyment, the worker might want to collectively decide the menu of a communal kitchen even it was a less efficient use of time.

No scheme for managing society will by itself create a new society. Highly democratic, highly authoritarian and mixed schemes are now used to administer capitalism. The basic quality of capitalism is that the average person has little or no control over their daily life. Wage labor dominates society. You must exchange your life to buy back your survival. Whether people under capitalism make the decisions about which records they buy, which inmates serve long sentences, what color the street lights are, etc., is irrelevant.

The community that escapes capitalism will involve people directly controlling the way they live. This is the individual and collective refusal of work, commodity production, and exploitation. This will involve much collective decision making and much individual decision making. The transformation cannot be reduced to a set way of making decisions or a fixed plan of action.

Not believing in democracy means not automatically knowing how to proceed

if people have a profound disagreement. So be it.



Anti-democratic Communism

Communists do not say that without capitalism we can guarantee that humans will create a human community. It says that with capitalism, humans cannot create a human community. It sees that any movement for a true community will oppose capitalist social order and social relationships all along the way. The motivating force will not come with a communist blue-print. It will come from living of proletarians creating a new social relation.

The spirit of collective power, of a community of masters, is exactly the opposite of the democratic spirit. Democracy drowns the individual in the choices of the majority. It presumes that the individual choice is always hostile to the power of the masses. Thus democratic ideology creates the paranoia that everything contrary to its current formalism of process is the same as Stalinist dictatorship.

The spirit of proletarian struggle can be seen when a group of partisans fan-out to defend a city. Each wing has the power to act alone in attacking capitalist forces. Each wing is just as willing to give in to the authority of the other proletarians when they indicate they know the terrain better.

The formal decision making process will depend on the situation. Unanimity, a majority vote, or minority action will be used depending on the terrain of the battle. It is not a matter of fixed rights but of people supporting each other.

Those who are taking back their lives must be strong and alive, not fair and democratic. When a mass of comrades satisfy their desires by looting a supermarket, they have acted directly on their collective wills. But it is ridiculous to say this action was fairer than them collectively voting for a congresswoman/man or voting to raise their taxes to pay for more police. They violated "process" by not polling everyone beforehand. It's not

a matter of whether looters could ever have the right number of people together to "have permission" to act. Proletarians should always act as actively allied creators of a new order, not as passively equal citizens.

Virtually all of the past two hundred years' lurches towards the potlatch, towards communism, have begun *undemocratically*. The rioters of LA did not require the formal permission of a decision-making body before creating their explosion. The insurrection that started the Spanish Civil War in 1936 began with a spontaneous reaction of workers to Francisco Franco's military coup. The wildcat general strike in May of 68 in Paris began with a spontaneous rejection of the entire society that was fueled by street fighting.

These same insurrections have tended to end when the fetish of democracy reasserted itself. May 68 reached its limits with union officials still controlling the gates of the striking factories.

These elected representatives of the workers separated the movement until everything cooled down. (Again there was certainly a lot of cheating in the French CGT's "union democracy" but this wouldn't have changed the final result. See "How To 'Go Beyond The SI' In Ten Simple Steps," this issue) In Spain 36, democratically elected anarchist union leaders controlled the tendency to communalize all society. They were able to convince the most militant workers that it would be undemocratic to impose socialism without the approval of the passive majority.

The dispossessed should not be fair but be alive and strong. To be anti-democratic is to reject the fetish of democracy, to not give any voting process an inherently superior position over the total process of living. Proletarians, those who have nothing to lose from the destruction of this society and know it, must become *anti-democratic* to achieve their ends.

Workers must seize control of their workplace or their neighborhood. Not to manage them in the same way as before but to have as much power as possible.

Even if at a certain point a group of proletarians use votes to decide the path taken, they cannot allow *democratic blessings* to justify their actions any more than they can allow reformism, unionism, or pacifism to mystify their actions. The number in favor of a decision will be only one factor among many influencing those who refuse the democratic fetish.

Minorities Confronting Democracy

The passive of today accept democracy more than ever. This weakness may be partially offset by the tremendous willingness of the system's propagandists to rely on raw democracy to accomplish its goals. Freedom of choice is no longer only given as a concession but is pushed constantly as a weapon.

At the point when revolutionaries realize that they have nothing to lose from the destruction of this society, they may realize the mirage of it's democracy. The LA riots were the most undemocratic action imaginable — absolutely no permission was ever asked by those who looted, either from authorities or from unions or from workers councils. Still there was no conscious critique of democracy in that short time in LA.

So we can imagine many more insurrections, like Paris 68, where masses with many democratic and other bourgeois illusions act in a practically communist manner. Here, if the word "democracy" is used by people to describe reconquering their own lives, self-conscious communists wouldn't mindlessly attack it. Rather, an anti-democratic minority would spell-out the practical actions that are necessary to achieve a new society and show how little formal democracy has to do with them. In those conditions, an anti-democratic minority is in a good position to fight the mystifications that have served as breaks on the earlier movements.



THE CRISIS SYSTEM

FABLES OF AUSTERITY

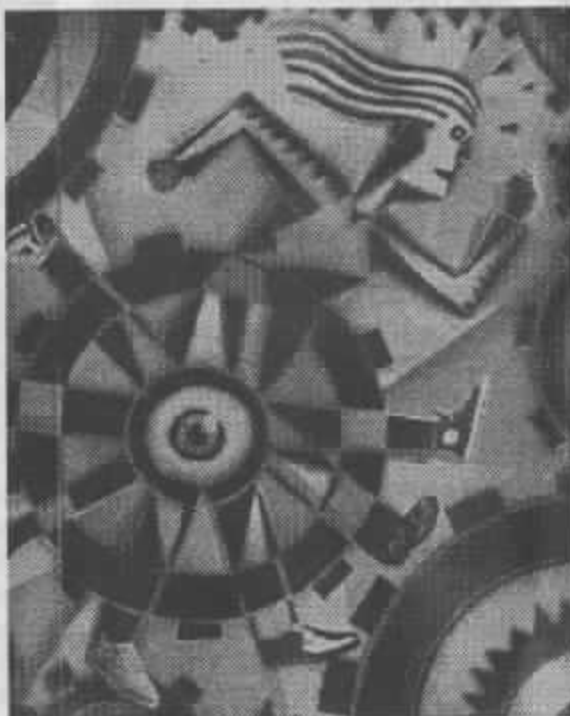
There's jam tomorrow and jam yesterday but never jam today...

Like lemmings, the obedient workers of today are expected to crush themselves on the myths of crisis, budget deficits, inflation, global competitiveness or high technology. Mysterious explanations of our falling wages appear and disappear like villains on day-time soaps. Stern bank presidents give unquestionable reasons why we must give one more pound of flesh for financial stability. CNN suddenly tells us the remote-control computerized world-market is the final arbitrator of our wage and work conditions. The 1994 US recovery was worse than the 1993 recession. The unemployment rate may have dropped a big 1% but unemployment benefits and youth summer jobs got cut more. The hours of those who had jobs have gone up to torture levels.

The usual rhetoric is that no one understands a 100 billion dollar deficit, a 3 trillion dollar economy or 1-trillion-dollar-a-week currency speculation. Of course the workings of the economy aren't simple. But we can still use abstraction and approximation to

understand the system.

The Federal Reserve sells us inflation, unemployment, and the deficit as forces independent from how we live. But no matter how elaborate the computerized money system becomes, the economy will always boil down to the way people relate to each other. A single person now cannot challenge



the economy. The initial barriers are the cops and the merchants. But the larger barrier is that no one person has a community, a collective response, to fall back on. The LA riots ended when people had looted most of the stuff that was in the area. They didn't form a community to either create a new way of living or to fend off the National Guard.

Wage labor seems simple. You sell your activity for something of value. But it hides how people's power to create their productive activity, then winds up confronting them as something external, outside their control. Cars, Nintendo games, houses and TV programs seem to come from the magical economy rather than coming from our activity. The single separation of wage labor

gives birth to the whole vast host of apparently autonomous economic forces.

We use the loose term crisis system to describe the methods of using its up and downs against us that the economy has developed since about 1970. To show how the crisis system rests on our alienation, we will look the two faces of wage labor - production and consumption.

CONSUMPTION

...*(the commodity) is a definite social relation between men, (sic) that in their eyes assumes the fantastic form of a relation between things. Marx, Capital, V.I, pg. 72. (rearranged to improve phrasing)*

The American form of the crisis system bares the marks of the affluent society that produced it. Even when 60% of workers live two pay-checks from homelessness, the image of massive wealth still dominates their lives.

The classical affluent society lasted from 1950 to about 1973. This model was promoted as a way to deal with excess labor militancy and factory capacity after WWII. It admitted that society produced enough to give everyone a bigger piece of the pie. But the pieces of the pie were only given in terms of participation in an artificial patriarchal community.

Workers sold their lives, their productive activity, to buy back enriched survival. Enriched survival (the "Package deal") is survival on both the physical and the social level. A conformist society expected a white, male, "middle-class" worker to have a well-paid factory or office job in the suburbs. He was expected to own a car and a house, support a wife and children and save enough money to send his kids to college. All his money would thus be spent keeping-up a pre-package life in the TV-defined pseudo-community. If the ideal "middle class" worker didn't have a wife and a house, he could be fired. Blacks, poor whites and women were excluded from this model. But enough people were affected that the newly created television networks could show a universal image of America having a

happy "Leave It To Beaver" life-style.

PRODUCTION

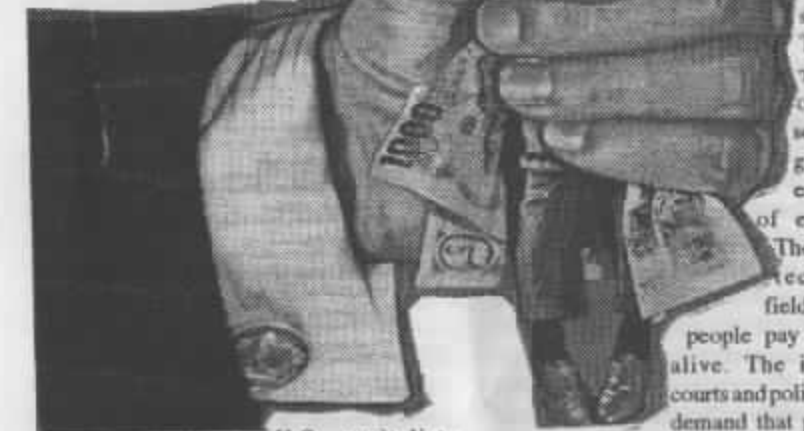
Myth: "My father worked hard so his children could get a better life. I think it's time our children had more of the same spirit." White House Chief Of Staff Leon Paneta, on working for a chance to work harder..

Myth: wages are equal to how productive a worker is.

What myth hides: wages tend to go down to the cost of reproducing a person on the level of social survival.

When workers are fighting defensively in this society, the fight comes down to negotiating the basic level of social survival - the social contract. The implicit question people collectively answer each is "how much can we take?"

Government, businesses and unions created the affluent society by engineering a high cost and highly policed system of social survival. "Corporate America" embraced the affluent society for twenty five years. It gave them a willing, well-controlled workforce. Since they had a monopoly over the world economy, the



U.S. capitalists preferred this conformity. With the struggles of the previous fifty years were in their minds, they chose "happy" workers living on suburban housing tracts over poor, angry slum workers.

Working class resistance and the force of the world markets eventually made corporations give up the affluent society package deal. Inspired by Vietnam, drugs and social disintegration, children of both workers and professionals had refused the social policing of the package deal. During the sixties and seventies, many people "dropped out." They used the affluent society's massive social slack for hedonistic, counter-cultural living. Welfare and alternative work

were often scammed.

Even relatively well-paid workers refused the discipline of the factory and went on wild-cat strike against company and the union. Also many smaller industrial corporations had broken unions and directly pushed down the price of survival. In both these trends, there was unfortunately not a collective response defending the interests of all of the exploited together.

The end of U.S. domination of the world economy was official when the Bretton-Woods treaty broke-down. The value of the US dollar could no longer be fixed artificially high. It came down and then high-priced energy imports pushed down wages. And average wages have kept going down ever since.

CONSUMPTION

TERROR

The consumption system kept expanding after the sixties. The marketers of today sell not only gadgets but entire fields of existence. The medical technology field demands people pay for being alive. The insurance, courts and police together demand that people pay

for the damage done by every kind of consumption. The justice system forces workers to pay massive insurance to drive to jobs that have moved to the suburbs. Software companies produce copyrights and patents on whole categories of information.

The marketing system of today covers a ridiculous, bloated area of life. Thus fewer and fewer can afford to buy simulations. The number of people covered by the corporate "package deal" is less and less each year. The workers who are covered toil ever more desperately to keep the same "life-style" on massively decreased wages. In the US, the average work-week is approaching 60 hours. Many former-housewives work to make the

income needed for a "middle-class" life-style.

The number of "plastic surgery" operations done in the US has doubled every five years since 1969. Clerks in large department stores must spend a large percentage of their wages simply on clothes for their jobs. The standards of appearance and attitude are daily raised to the point where fewer and fewer people can satisfy them. Appearance as an endless staircase of prestige was systematically begun with fashion magazine femininity (glamour) sold to middle-class housewives. It is now being intensified and generalized to all men and women.

RACKETS

Fewer people being able to pay is not by itself a problem for the giant corporations. It only changes the way business works. The crisis system supplements the affluent society with a greater accumulation of confusion, competition and rackets. The new rhetoric: To preserve the pie, fewer people will get a slice.

All the producers of simulations also become owners of rackets. They extract surplus value directly out of those who will not pay for their package deals. Record publishers quietly collect royalties from the blank tape makers. The law assumes that a certain percentage of people who use blank tapes will make illegal copies of records. Coca-cola and Pepsi promote a whole life style and are moving to control this life style more and more beginning with legal trademark litigation to protect their image. Multi-media companies which own images, ideas or ways of doing things far out-do any mafia street protection scam.

The expansion of the police, copyright controls, gangs and "Intellectual property" are the after-life of extended survival. They give corporations profits beyond the social survival of those in the package deal. (See ASAN #4, pg. 26, The Information System).

The most "advanced" systems of capitalism have been the most desirable to export to the former colonial nations. Thus arms and intellectual property - the tools of rackets - are the most widely exported commodities world-wide.

The rotten "middle class" of government and corporate functionaries in South America, Africa, or the former Soviet Bloc look to Levi's Jeans and take up American corporate



culture. These classes created by rackets - war economies and nationalist looting.

AUTOMATION

The Myth: we are now in a post industrial society where robots have taken "the good jobs."

The new rhetoric of this society is that capitalists have automated everything to the point where workers are no longer needed. It continues the "end of the working class" with a different rhetoric. The TV once said everyone who worked was middle class. The TV now says everyone who works is gone, useless.

In terms of bare technology many companies could have started firing half their workers ten or twenty years ago. Even an un-automated factory can supply the needs of a vastly disproportionate number of people. The American "Great Depression" saw unemployment hovering around twenty percent for years. Thus a part of the population wound up supporting the entire economy. Today, six million people work two jobs.

Robots, for example, have not had quite the labor-saving impact the propaganda claims. Toyota Motors recently opened-up a special less-automated factory in Japan to produce less-expensive cars. For the market, a human has an advantage over a robot. Humans are general purpose. They can be produced with commonly available materials. They reproduce themselves without being told to do so. They can be supported with modest supplies or even no supplies at all for a while.

The advantages of robots can often be illusory. The power machine and the computer have already eliminated the top and the bottom of labor leaving a wide middle. While robots can produce much more of a single item, they still require supervision. They must be programmed for each given task. They are expensive to produce. They must be maintained periodically. They are only applicable to a single production method.

PRODUCTION TERROR
"The de-industrialization of America" is not a matter of

production technology. It is a matter of capital imposing social reorganization on us. The affluent society has broken-down in American more completely than in Europe or other industrialized countries. When more American workers bought the suburban package-deal, more real solidarity was worked out of the culture. In Europe or Australia, old forms of working class solidarity survived a little more the build-up of the consumer society. So these societies now have been less successful smashing social solidarity.

The period of "post-industrialism" is simply capital reaping the false consciousness it had sowed in the affluent society. Once the affluent society broke down, capitalists no longer had to put automation in terms of giving people more "free time." They could rework the production process as much as they wanted.

The importance of robots and computers is often to allow a new type of production. Since the mid-eighties, auto companies have produced engines with micro-fine tolerance of parts. This makes them both more efficient and makes it impossible to maintain them with normal tools. Thus the large manufacturers have managed to capture the home-grown car maintenance market. This hasn't lowered the production cost of a car - indeed prices have risen and have no been entirely artificially held up. It has thus simply re-distributed the production process over a wide area.

"Labor-saving" improvements are more important for changing the way workers confront their jobs than for total labor savings. If a General Motors can break the production of a factory into many parts, each of which happens in a different part of the world, GM can give the impression that no single worker is necessary. They can eliminate the effect of a strike of the whole factory or of any crucial element. They can force workers to expend the maximum creative energy doing "all the jobs" instead of each worker having fixed duties. This reorganization is a political accomplishment. The rhetoric of "the death of the working class" helps this happen. The capitalist may not have changed either the technology or the production process.

The constant re-organization of production is part of the permanent market-based churning of all life. The production process is fragmented and transferred over a larger and larger area. Large companies no longer dream of fully automating everything. Instead, each corporation creates an ideal version of a person's relations to production

- their "corporate culture." The power machine and the computer eliminate the top and the bottom of work. The perfect simulation is the perfect relation of worker to production but this has no one single perfection.

The permanent chaos of production is driven by the electronically organized world market. The operation of the market is so utterly short-term that it forces managers to over-turn the conditions that guaranteed their profits and power before. "If it's not broken, break it" urges one management guru. The churning of the world market gives capital a free hand in exploiting its natural enemy, us, the working class. The extension of the market has divided the working class as much as it has united the ruling class. Every ostensibly oppositional organization serves as a means of increasing this division. Unions only exist to teach workers to only struggle in certain areas in certain ways. Nationalists today all say they want "their people" to win in global competition.

Thus capital makes constant war on the working class. There is no effort to create a truce, even to make things easier on the ruling class. Employer constantly try to destroy the working class as a category. They try to destroy any hint of solidarity. They lower wages to bare survival or lower. They create a vast police state. They give the impression that all activity is acquiesced on by the masses, etc.

The myth of work itself no longer mattering is a part of this war. Wage labor, in its most horrible incarnation in decades, is still at the heart of capitalism. It simply no longer has the garments of respectability that unionism or Budweiser commercials once gave it.

SHIT WORK

From the numerical logic of production, the ideal worker is the dispossessed worker of the third world country, the bottom worker. From accounting's logic, there is no need for them to have more than "bare bones" existence.

The ideal worker from the logic of consumption and management is the top worker. She or he extends the domain of the simulation. She or he produces programs, does research or otherwise uses the full power of existing machinery. The ideal higher level worker is skilled and flexible. But since they are good consumers, they won't band together with other workers to make demands about working conditions or types of work done etc. This ideal worker lives in conditions of perfect atomized consumption. European countries attempt to adapt their workers to this role by having their unions create cowed

simulations of rebellion thereby removing any real threat of rebellion. This model has been harder to sell to workers or on the world market.

The "shit worker," the worker at the bottom resolves, the points where the simulation has failed. The bottom worker uses out-dated machinery to construct junk when the robots fail.

The ideal bottom worker makes pennies a day. A strong patriarchal state is best at guaranteeing their hard work. This state crushes all rebellion but keeps the worker in adequate health and spreads the ideology that work is a privilege.

The bottom worker survives mostly on the official margins, on stolen time or in shadowy areas not recognized by the world market. In the third world, most labor is also outside of the world market's accounting. It appears as support, a corollary of the world market that is not measurable in the dollars of this market but which the system still needs.

In Nigeria, Mexico and Peru, the largest population group is a vast army of "unemployed" scavengers. These are former peasants driven off the land and into the cities. They survive through combing trash and cooperating in shanty towns on the outskirts of huge and growing cities.

China has been the fastest growing economy in the world for the last five years. Here the former Stalinist state indirectly subsidizes export production. They sell land, electricity and labor at artificially low prices supported by the still surviving Stalinist central planning system. These prices can only be sustained by a state which simply takes much of the produce of the Chinese peasant.

Planners naturally try to merge the top workers and the bottom workers while perfecting each model's special properties. Cycles of recovery and recession allow hedonism and puritanism to alternately dominate ideologically.

The first world/third world division of labor under capitalism is being broken up. It is reappearing in the ideological division of the population in each area into apparently different "races" or social classes - who are all proletarians.

To preserve its rackets, the marketing system extends hierarchical consumption. In the classical "industrial revolution," low-paid workers could consume the food, clothing and shelter needed for bare survival. Workers knew they were dispossessed since they had nothing. Under hierarchical consumption, survival is never guaranteed. If you consume more, you are just more

explicitly questioning the system.

Still today, not quite as many people see cars, fancy clothes, and houses in the suburbs as privileges. Ads more often show them now as desperate escapes from even more desperate situations. When you buy natural food, you pay extra for food they promise not to put poison in. When yuppies buy gap cotton clothes, they pay for "the soft, natural feeling that escapes a plastic impersonal society." When you pay for insurance on a car, you pay for the cost of the accidents and death from an irrational transportation system.

The working class has both rejected the "values" that are promoted by the ruling class, resisted particular incidents of increased exploitation and risen-up in "irrational" attacks on the entire system.

GM worker went on a short strike start September 24, 1994 against the forced overtime in the "Buick City" plant. This strike shut down most of GM's US production, which had been going at maximum capacity.

The question of exactly how far this misery can go will be answered in term of misery, spirit, and physical survival.

We will see as always.

likely to survive. The better the neighborhood, the less likely a "psycho" is to kill you. The better the clothes, the more likely you will have friends. The better the health plan, the less likely you are to die in a ditch. The better the insurance, the less likely a disaster is to destroy your life savings. So if one accepts the terror as given, every level of consumption can masquerade as a level of privilege. So you can feel even if you are more miserable than a medieval serf.

Hierarchical consumption is a world strategy of development. Consumer society is still, is even more, devoted to creating artificial needs now that these needs can be met by fewer and fewer people. The terror of increasing needs calls on workers and managers to donate extra labor to capital in the vague of gaining favor. Everywhere, the multi-national corporations use more of this surplus, unpaid labor.

"You pout, you're out" - David Hasselhoff, star and co-producer of the low budget sit-com Baywatch demands total "effervescent enthusiasm" from anyone who works in the production company. (Sf Chronicle, dec 2, 1991)

In advanced nations, much of the activity of creating ideologies comes through this unpaid, "entrepreneurial" labor. New "lifestyles" come from subcultures on the edge of consumer society. From Raiders jackets to acting classes to tattoos, isolated consumers labor to add the meaning missing in the vacuum of modern life. They then sell these ways of living to merchandisers at a discount.

The full crisis system tries to merge consumption and production in the racket worker. The racket worker is a low-level entrepreneur. The racket worker perfects hierarchical consumption. They must constantly fend for their survival with little or no knowledge of what will follow. The independent designer who does the work typesetters used to do, the trainer, the taxi driver, and most exactly the cop all fit this ideal. They must guard their piece of little capital. They move ambiguously between shit worker and privileged worker - knowing only vaguely how far they are in either direction.

RESISTANCE

The development of the means of production, the resistance levels of key workers and the resistance of the entire society decide how much the crisis system can exploit us.

The weapon that has been lacking is a view of the entire process. This view would give an extra enzyme to any attack by



The American military/media complex backed its mass bombing of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi conscripts with false stories of Iraqi soldiers ripping babies out of incubators. The police-media complex uses two or three incidents of

child molesting to justify a vast increase in the police state, including "Three Strikes Your Out."

These examples don't form a rational argument but instead focus the spectator's thoughts on pure innocence versus

animalistic violence. The intended effect is to make the spectator not care for a rational discussion of the situation.

...and The Left

Viva Mexico, Viva Caesar Chavez, Viva Colgate

Slogan of 24th Street Fare

The ridiculous posturing of the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) is both revealing and a trap. The RCP has the virtue of stating plainly what it is after. Strutting up and down a street with Mao signs is ridiculous. But it is not fundamentally a more ridiculous ritual than putting on a tie and going to work as an office manager. It is only more out of date.

It is easy for both Rush Limbaugh and "anti-authoritarians" to say that every little Leninist party is simply filled with power-mad assholes. But this simply lets one not

think about who exactly these people are. "They appear out of nowhere and they are bad."

The "authoritarianism" of the RCP is only one symptom of their general managerial mentality. Other leftists like Green Peace can use mushy liberalism or bureaucratic consensus procedure to the same ends.

The left is not a matter of evil organizations vying for power. The left is es-

entially a collection of more or less sincere people pushing their solutions to

that the government and news media use to manage the average person's reactions to their everyday lives. The left takes the same categories and tries to give them a different "spin."

But this society's categories ("issues") are themselves the most manipulative part of this society's dialogue about itself. "Should We have better health care or lower taxes" - should those on the bottom suffer more or those slightly above them should suffer more. Green party hacks demand taxes on workers driving to work to pay for public transportation. But many relatively poor workers would still be forced to drive to work. As long as we think about ways to

the problems of this society. They often have bourgeois backgrounds, but not always. The problem is they think in the same terms as this society. Leftist's whole mode thinking revolves around specialized issues.

When leftist "address issues" they want to solve capitalism's problems rather than destroy capitalism. "The environment," "Classism," Racism, Sexism, or Hatred of Immigrants are boxes

manage education, health care or "crime," we will only be able to think about this sort of society, where all these "problems" can never be solved.

As a tendency, the left uses all forms of progressive capitalist control - managerialism, specialization, morality, nationalism, democracy, terrorism. These are the methods that let this society become more advanced, more "normal." In fact, the main



reason the RCP looks stupid is that they look towards an archaic method of capitalist development. In 1950, a bureaucratic/ideological party was perfectly suited to the capitalist development of a peasant society such as China. Today's integrated world market demands moralistic, democratic ("pragmatic") development. Capital's world division of ideological labor limits Maoism to very underdeveloped regions like Peru and outlying islands in the Philippines.

Leftists think like and usually come from the bureaucratic section of "middle management." They are managers who have a stake in the entire system rather than in one or another faction within the world economy - social workers, priests, government planners etc.

The left was once united as all those people who sought a total solution to this society's problems. The left, all leftists together, was the representative of total change in the system (even while it supported the system). The ideology of a capitalism without contradictions reached its apex with the rise of Stalinism. Stalinist Russia united the world's leftists into communist parties with the promise of society with no unemployment, no competition, no in-

equality and no corruption - in other words, a rationally managed version of America.

It's End

The defined, unified left is gone. There is no longer the "community of progressive people," who from liberal democrats to "Communist" Party hacks altogether looked towards a progressive state solution to this society's problems. The "free market" dominates the ideology of all stripes of reformers.

The left's disappearance does present a credibility problem to capital's marketplace of solutions. But this disappearance comes as capital no longer feels much need to give credibility to a unified opposition. A cloud of ad-hoc mystifications offers a better management strategy than the single lie of a state solution to every problem. As it has lost its unity as the representative of the new, the left has fully merged with morality. Its politics becomes mobilizing the masses to contemplate a whirlpool of fragmented choices - does this choice hurt Blacks, does this choice hurt home owners, does this choice hurt animals, etc. Ross Perot appears representing nothing except a "third product." Presidential elections with three ridiculous choices rather than

two are calculated to give sufficient coverage to the voter anger that polls had predicted.

Even the most extreme piece-meal reformers still accept the world market. They just ridiculously promise a way to make their reforms economical. "The Crips And The Blood's Plan To Rebuild LA" involved attracting cocaine drug lords' "multi-national" capital to enrich South-Central Los Angeles. (This plan was naturally concocted by "gang-outreach" social workers rather than by the gangs - who have no high leaders who can speak for them.)

The destruction of community lets a reform become morality; a series of pre-defined choices within each issue. "Prosperity zones" - slave camps - are put forward as hope because they can be put forward, because the solidarity that would reject such slavery has been smashed. "Should we raise taxes or close schools?" is no longer seen as a struggle between "socialism" and "capitalism." It is more honestly framed as a fight between present development and future development. "Community leaders" can be recruited to fight on both sides of this sort of "community issue."

Anti-moral Communism

Communism is explicitly anti-moral. Communists do not have a morality they wish to impose on society. Rather they see new social relations that might incidentally have certain values.

All myths and moralities seek to axiomatize human behavior. Communism instead seeks to give human beings mastery over the material conditions that influence their behavior. They must both follow values and create their values.

Talking about the proletariat isn't saying that "class is a more fundamental oppression than race or gender oppression." We have no interest in oppression as a force that will by itself generate

revolution - instead we look to communist relations as a new way of living that will incidentally remove each type of oppression in this society.

Since communism is people acting for themselves, it will not need to justify itself in the name of morality, democracy or other cloaks now used to hoodwink the masses.

Unfortunately or fortunately, communism cannot be a return to pure animal existence. Communists must also redirect the urge for pleasure. But they do it consciously, knowing they do it as a part of their existence and not to sacrifice their existence.

Communism uses force to separate itself from capitalism. The conscious destruction of the economy, of exchange, is community reappearing and imposing itself on society. Communism destroys the space where people can simply engage in neutral, "normal" activity that "doesn't hurt anyone." It will be a return to festivals, to real life but it will equally be the prohibition of alienation, of spectator hood and of servitude.



Our Activity

An Action Against Earth Day

A small number of trouble-makers disrupted Earth Day at Ohlone College in Fremont. Fremont is also an good site for subversion since left and right ideology have not yet conditioned everyone into expecting protests to always be the same.

The assault took three phases

1) Local High School students were recruited using the ostensible ruse that a "Southern Alameda Skate-off" was to be held at the same location as the Earth Day Activities. On the appointed day, approximately eighty skaters showed up, twenty of whom refused all pleas to vacate the premises. (Most of these were high school students knew the skate-off was fake but used it as an excuse to skip their school and come to Ohlone.)

From ten o'clock to approximately twelve, our contingent and the skaters effectively played tag with the incompetent Ohlone college security goons, moving through the split-level campus and causing a small amount of disruption.

We effectively re-assembled at the main area and held our ground against the security goons by having our contingent shout that the cops had no right to control anyone's lives.

2) At twelve o'clock, we brought out a television and smashed it after a brief scuffle and distributed leaflets to the earnest ecology fetishists.

3) A blasé ecology professor read a speech that could be summarized as follows: "capitalism will soon destroy all life on earth no matter what we do. But seeing students doing ecology projects makes me feel better."

Afterwards, one of us made the following impromptu statement over the PA:

"We are here to disrupt Earth Day because it is still for corporate capitalist control of our lives. As the previous speaker mentioned, all of the eco-friendly activities of today could continue indefinitely and the capitalist system would still destroy the planet in a

short time. As long as the system of capitalist control of our lives goes on, no amount of eco-friendly rhetoric will matter.

"Here is just one example. The hole in the ozone today was not caused by aerosol cans but mainly by chlorofluoro carbons release by micro-chip manufacturing plants. These plants were mandated by the government to use these ozone-destroying chemicals after the destructive effect they had on the ozone was known and after aerosol spray cans had already been recalled. Government policy decisions fixed so that enough of these chemicals would be released to keep destroying the ozone for another fifty years.

"As long as we give this system control over our lives, it will keep making decisions of this sort. '50 things you can do to save the planet' will do nothing.

"The reason the government goes to a big effort to push Earth Day is to convince people that they are responsible for the misery of their lives when they fail to save up all their garbage.

"The only force in opposition to this is people taking autonomous control of their lives in opposition to the system. For that reason, the youth here to occupy space and enjoy themselves are the only radical effort in this area. If you want to begin to fight the system, take control of your neighborhood, your school, your workplace and your life."

This sort of action in an obscure suburb is important to break capital's division of space into unruly inner city and satisfied suburbia. This action was also much more satisfying than an ordinary march or demonstration because each moment was unpredictable. We played cat and mouse with security and had to create our strategy as we went along rather than act according to some stage-managing.

A discussion group

In spring of 1992, some friends organized a discussion group around the Situationist International. This group went on for approximately six months and

then broke-up with bad feelings on several peoples parts. We made some vague contacts with certain people in the group but by the end, it was obvious that none of us had learned the slightest amount from any of the discussions.

Even before the group began, I could think of several reasons it would fail. So I wouldn't claim to have done any better than anyone else - I didn't really learn anything either. Still, just because our adventure was so typical, it is useful to look at it as a kind of field study in non-communication.

The group gradually broke down into two groups. One was loosely definable as "politically-oriented" straight, white men and another was a mostly queer group of "artistically-oriented" men and women. The actual discussions had consisted in one of us reading a short passage from one or another Situationist texts and then another person giving a summary or of someone giving a simple summary. The discussions were usually done in a halting, uncertain way that seemed to me to allow anyone who wanted to interject. But the main people talking were usually the "guys."

While occasionally we would debate various points, none of the conflicts appeared in the questions being discussed. Rather the discussion group became mostly a way of people being together - when we were getting along, we were happy and when we weren't getting along we were angry. While we had a few slightly confrontational meetings, the main complaints of the groups were never directly stated. If it weren't for various harsh words repeated to third parties, I would have the impression that things had simply drifted apart.

The group seemed to fail because it counted on the transparent subjectivity of friendship to replace a conscious effort co-ordinate politics. The group was organized with the implicit, naive format of "let's just sit and talk about each article and then ideas will come." When



we started the group just expecting to "sit and talk," we counted on this transparent subjectivity to smooth over the problems of different viewpoints. But instead it simply allowed us to never discuss our conflicts.

We were confronting the critical question of subjectivity in a way that had already been determined by the social conditions. This is exactly the opposite of how critical questions of subjectivity should be handled in this age of infinite falsification.

This shows the SI's subjectivist position in it's worst light. Revolutionary theory is not a matter of perfecting subjectivity. A systematic effort is needed to go beyond our conditions of subjective

existence. That doesn't mean we shouldn't systematically explore the power of the revolutionary subjective. We should use and explore resources intelligently and strategically.

Today, one subjectivity cancels another subjectivity. In a future world, one subjectivity could instead blend with the other subjectivity. But our task isn't simply to simulate that future world. Since we live in capitalist society, it forces us to make the arbitrary subjectivist choices that separates people with this society. We choose aesthetics of punk rock, hippy, femme, macho, etc. We live in one or another equally boring cities each offering a different promise of protection from the general conditions of

banality. As enemies of the present order, we try to also make strategic choices of what will weaken the system the most. Until we gain more power, these choices will be intertwined within the choices of pseudo-identity the system offers us.

Revolutionaries should plan-on using their small resources to help free-up a vast amount of resources once a revolutionary upheaval is under-way. The subjective misery of today's society will likely be one of the sparks that creates the next inferno. But since our perspective is to help things go as far as possible, we are confronted by the need to go beyond pure subjectivity.

GO "BEYOND THE SI" IN TEN SIMPLE STEPS

1 Origins

The Situationist International was founded in 1957 and broke-up in 1973. The SI developed a theory of personal and social revolutionary action that attacked the total conditions of modern life.

Within the spectacle's narrow field of vision, situationist theory is barely visible as the enemy of "everything." It floats in that vague region slightly beyond the terrain of paid thinkers. It's role in the dynamics of changing this society is still as ambiguous as the impulse toward "love" in personal relations. It can both justify mystified, middle-class, artistic individualism and give a stepping-stone to revolutionaries coming to understand capitalism.

The SI is noted for having had a wide influence on the nation-wide wildcat general strike that began in Paris on May 1968. The SI broke-up in the aftermath of May 68, unable to deal with this new period of struggle.

This article does not attempt a full summary of the Situationists' history. Like any dialectical work, we idealize Situationist theory into a historical tendency. We then discuss how other tendencies interact and go beyond their tendency. The SI was closest to these idealized positions after 1963, when it explicitly broke from any positive artistic projects. The "political" SI is best known in English from the *Situationist Anthology* (Bureau Of Public Secrets, P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley, CA 94701). Other works are cited in the bibliography at the end of *Some Terms*. Also, to simplify our task, we will not *a priori* judge the SI by the many ridiculous characters who have been attracted to situationist theory.

For us, the SI's concrete weaknesses come most into focus in its relationship to theories of self-management. While some of their writings go beyond the self-management ideology, they were not able to reject self-management in the practical struggles of their time.

Moreover, they were unable to theorize the conditions of the subjectivist ideology that this society did and does generate.

The SI's theories came out of a combination of artistic and political groups. The Lettrist International, among other groups, was attempting to extend the force of art beyond surrealism to encompass all life. "Socialism or



Barbarism," (S ou B in French) came out of Trotskyism but had formulated a *councilism* in their efforts to go beyond Bolshevism.

The SI's political economy came out of Socialism or Barbarism. S ou B had entirely rejected the Bolshevik counter-revolution in Russia. But like other reactions to Bolshevism, S ou B tended to mythologize the dictatorial mania of the Bolsheviks. They saw authoritarianism as the active creator of the soviet state-capitalist regime. They failed to see an entire historic dynamic that involved backwardness, managerialism and lack of intention to abolish the world market. S ou B extended this theory to say that the capitalist duality of worker/owner had been superseded by the bureaucratic duality order-giver/order-taker.

The SI's artistic theories were taken from the Lettrist International. This group developed the idea that the unproductive members of society, "the drones," were the most oppressed sector of society.

To achieve the program of these groups, the SI translated the contradictions of the capitalist system into various structural contradictions. At different times, they put capital's contradictions in terms of the contradiction between the fragmented and the total, between the subjective and the objective and between the active and the passive.

In these ideas the SI was similar to "western Marxism." What set the SI apart was its praxis of refusing to be compromised with any part of the existing system.

2 Separation

"The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human power into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of man." Society Of The Spectacle, Thesis

20.

The SI sometimes characterized the ruling system, "the spectacle," as the system of separation. As the market expands, it needs to sell more commodities. To sell a commodity, a capitalist has to make people not just want the commodity but need the commodity. Capital fragments more and more areas of previously undifferentiated social life into quantifiable units. This forces now-atomized workers to meet their needs externally rather than through community - direct non-market relations.

Alienation/separation could/can be seen equally in the order of factories, malls, universities or leftist meetings.

The SI continued Marx's critique of political economy by stating that this society still reduced the wage of a worker to survival. But that survival had become enriched survival. No matter how wealthy the worker becomes, the commodities they buy only give survival on the social level.

"The success of the economic system of separation is the proletarianization of the world." Society Of The Spectacle, Thesis 26.

The SI's theory of separation described the (idealized) effects of the market - before "canned" (recorded) music, people would sing together without any market exchange. There were still highly skilled musicians who people went to see but people still had the ability create their own music. Recorded music substituted a commodity for people's tendency to create their own music. Once recorded music became established, most people forgot or never learned how to carry a tune or play an instrument. Music on Records, tapes, and CDs is a commodity workers need to make life tolerable. In this same way, the specialist musician gained a monopoly on the production of music. The quality of mainstream music itself also never gets better than tolerable.

The view of the market is that the appeal of things like pre-recorded music comes from their convenience. But this convenience also is the destruction of community. Everyone is short of time and there is no collective process to think about the final results of each person's individual decisions. From this view point, the economy doesn't grow in size but simply carves social existence into smaller parts.

3 Pseudo-opposition

The SI also described capital as a system of specialization; as the reign of specialists. This system's vast variety of apparently opposed powers are unified in administering separations. Each power represents one type of specialized control.

"[The western and eastern blocs of capital] are not preparing for war but for an infinite preservation of this balance [of nuclear deterrence], which is in the image of the internal stabilization of their power." Geopolitics of Hibernation, SI Anthology p. 76

The Russian revolution was a pivotal point for this process. Here, the representatives of the working class created a bureaucracy that ruled in the name of the working class but reproduced the conditions of capitalist society. Once the Russian counter-revolution was perfected, the representatives of change became part of the bureaucratic system.

The reign of the specialist seeks to represent every possible change in the same way the marketers look to sell products for every desire. Unionists, Communist Party hacks, and journalists reinforce the system by reproducing its bureaucratic order. It does not matter whether they are ostensibly opposed to each other or "capitalism."

4 Their Practice

"...the revolutionary organization must learn that it can no longer combat alienation with alienated means." This was a central tenant of the SI. The statement contains many of their theory's strengths and weaknesses.

Behind the entire praxis of the SI was the understanding that the movement for communism had been defeated but that this simply changed the conditions of the struggle for communism. This society was still capitalist and it still contained the germs of its own negation.

Community and proletarian struggles always exists potentially. Their possible forms change as capital develops. As daily life becomes more and more impoverished, people are forced to challenge either the entire order or nothing. As the market tries to manage and control more and more parts of life that previously had been generated by a community, communist struggles become more and more focused against this representation.

Authentic communist struggles previously took the form of organized working class movements — unions, councils, parties etc. In fully developed capital, it has mainly taken the form of an atomized resistance to the order of daily life and a vague awareness that occasionally bubbles into massive rebellions. The Paris May 68 wildcat general strike was the quintessential Situationist event in that much of it's explicit program was rejecting the rhythm of this entire society.

The SI created their organizational principles to fight on the ambiguous ground that capital's expanding control created. Within academia (or any realm of the spectacular life), anything could (and still can) be considered but there is no way to live ideas - so even critical ideas can co-exist with the most ridiculous garbage.

The SI dealt with this by saying that their theory and their practice were inseparable. The SI created their "practice of refusal" as a counter strategy to the specialist's method of trapping all thought within vacuous dialogues. The organizational principles of the SI demanded that members not be specialists of any sort. SI members were expected to reject work, "sexual repression," leadership, stars, specialized careers, and consumerism.

Refusal meant turning theory into practice on an everyday level. At the beginning of the SI, different situations created a number of artistic projects to "change life." The SI in its political phase welcomed attacks on cars, journalists, and unionists during strikes. These were unconscious attacks on the entire spectacle and its organization of false dialogue, attacks which they attempted to give voice to.

This practical refusal of the order of this society allowed situationist theory move beyond the traps of academicism, pure revolutionary militancy and spectacular stardom.

The SI expected all Revolutionaries to act in purely non-alienated, subjective manner to oppose the mechanistic, rationalistic order of the present.

5 Strategy

As a counter-strategy to the advancing control of this society, the SI created and used the critical terms subjectivity, detournement, ideology, recuperation, spectacle, specialist, etc. These were not simply descriptions of the economy's domination of social life. They were strategic tools for attacking both this domination and the economy itself. (We take our definitions of each of these approximately from the SI. See *Some Terms*, pg. 6). These evoked the idea that all social life is the occupied terrain of capital. Like the practice of refusal, this attacked the market's constant claims of neutrality and naturalness.

The idea of *Subjectivity* was an attack to the entire calculated, specialized, "objective" order of life under managed capital. The counter part to bureaucratic capital's build-up of objective wealth is the subjective poverty of modern life.

Bureaucratic capital calculates the entire objective order of life to minimally satisfy all calculable needs. Not only are human beings given food, clothing and shelter but they get calculated doses of entertainment (TV), choice (elections), self-understanding (psychiatrists) and so on. But the real living is outside of these things. Thus capital creates more of a subjective feeling of total oppression as it perfects its objective order. The SI saw a realm of the subjective that would appear and stand head to head against the objective order.

Recuperation allows a revolutionary to see the continued misery of capitalist society as a battle for social terrain. What masquerades as boredom is really defeat. Seeing the unity of capitalist culture allows rebels to attack it in it's entirety.

The SI realized that capitalist society constantly expands the area it controls. Any potentially revolutionary action has to be understood in light of this expanding framework. The mistakes of movements twenty or fifty years earlier had become incorporated into the methodology of capital in 1957 or later; Youth rebellion was sold in a pre-packaged form by record marketers be-

ginning in the fifties. The Communist Party had made an industry out of taking control of and destroying revolutions in every part of the globe. Unions, whether a revolutionary force or not, had once been produced mainly by the struggles of the working class. By the fifties, unions in France (and America) were bureaucratic organizations tied to the state. The eight-hour day had been granted to make people work harder during those eight hours and to create managed leisure time for workers to consume all the goods that capitalism produced. (It now has been effectively abandoned in the US with three-job families and forced over-time but with the work-day still kept at a high intensity.)



6 Structuralism

The SI's main strength was applying the abstract categories of political economy to particular structures that were dominant in their time; bureaucratic capitalism, managed leisure, enriched survival, and the cold war. The SI's weaknesses came as they took their structural interpretations of capitalist society to be its fundamental characteristics. Thus they believed that to destroy this society, it was sufficient to end this alienated activity.

The situationist emphasis on subjectivity and it's emphasis capital as bureaucracy were conjugate weaknesses. If you see capital as a machine, on some levels, pure anti-mechanical activity will be seen as an autonomous positive force.

SI viewed boredom or passivity or bureaucracy or hierarchy as the forces that controlled people. *"Boredom is counter revolutionary."* Thus they could see a certain animal forces — true pleasure or generalized self-management — that would cause people to act in a communist way *without being conscious about it.*

The Situationists formulated their theories within the affluent society. During the 1950s and 60s, it seemed that capital had controlled it's tendency towards economic crisis by using Keynesianism inspired government interventions. The economies of almost all nations experienced steady growth through-out that entire period. *The economy was seen as nothing but a vast feed-back system that could be controlled as easily as a rocket going to the moon.*

The economy was thus merely an instance of a total system of control or separation. Vaneigem defines ownership as a variety of power in *Basic Banalities #5*, (Situationist Anthology pg. 91). SI as a whole groped for a definition of political economy in terms of fixed power structures without getting to the level of a critique of political economy. The SI, like managerial theorists of their time, saw the progress of capital as the reduction of life to a machine-like order.

But, while any fixed command structure exists potentially within capitalist relations, the relationship of wage labor goes beyond any structurally definable power relationship.

Wage labor is a dialectal relationship. Wage labor as a social relation constrains the theoretically unlimited creativity of human activity within a relatively small

area, but an area whose size and structure cannot be exactly fixed.

What makes this society capitalist is both single moments, single inputs and the goals, processes and results of those single moments. There's more to capitalism than a pure, subjective moment. It is possible to have pleasure in a purely capitalist way. It is possible to enjoy your job under wage labor. It isn't common and it still maintains the entire system. The system itself may be miserable and murderous but we cannot be simply against misery.

When a capitalist buys the labor power of a worker, any form of human creativity can now confront other workers as an apparently separate, alien object. This gives modern society its tremendous, (usually empty), variety.

The power of abstract exchange also gives capital a wide spectrum of tactics that can be used against the proletariat. Capital generates a vast array of consumer goods as well as alternative products, naturalist ideologies, and opportunities for pseudo-participation. In a crisis situation, Capital can simply balance more self-management or "authenticity" or "self-realization" or community within its total accounting.

The SI understood capital's flexibility as its ability to recuperate. But since they described this system as the spectacle, the sum of mechanical controls, they believed that capital's ability to recuperate was limited.

To them, "authentic" relations could not be recuperated because they were opposed to capital's machine-like order. If boredom was counter-revolutionary, fun (pure subjectivity) must be revolutionary.

The SI's structuralism was often right in describing the general direction of capitalist management. Usually work is a relationship between order givers and order takers. But not always. Usually it is boring. But not always. People acting autonomously make the normal order of life impossible to maintain. But it does not automatically create a new situation.



History

A purely structuralist analysis fails to understand history as a progression of contradictory stages. People do not simply react to the inputs of the structures. They also react to possibilities that open up and circumstances that change.

The SI structurally mythologized the past. Also in *Basic Banalities* (p.90 Situationist Anthology), Vaneigem describes ownership in terms of spreading subjectivity. This sort of approach, which sees capitalist relations as a structure gradually spreading and reinforcing itself, does not take into account the pivot points of power.

Ownership and exchange have always existed at least on the outskirts of human society. Civilization became

capitalist when exchange became the dominant relationship. But this domination didn't happen when it controlled many people's lives directly but when it became dominant within power's center of gravity. As Emmanuel Wallerstein points out, capital did not spread from village to village but from trading center to trading center, and only later from the center to the periphery. Most of the people in France were still peasants at the start of the French Revolution but autonomous surplus value had already gained enough potential power to rule for itself.



The SI equally mythologized the democratic future they looked towards. The point where the structuralist analysis of capital falls down is in describing what forces can destroy the entire order of capital. The only counter force to capitalist relations is a total, conscious organization of society - Communism. Communism does not necessarily have exactly definable structures. Workers councils might not be communist and communist organizations might not use workers councils.

Communist organization demands absolute power - this is the suppression of the economy and all ideological power that derives from and maintains the economy. Communists must do more than understand that capital is flexible. They must understand that a conscious organization needs to act to immediately suppress the most powerful forces of its enemies. This is the same thing as an conscious way of life maximizing it's own force.

The SI's structuralism made it see communism as an extension of pure subjectivity - equalitarian management systems extended to all parts of society and social life - "generalized self-management." During May 68, the SI specifically assumed that the force that would automatically sweep capital aside was an alternative method of decision making. "All Power To The Workers Councils" was the first slogan of the situationist-influenced Council To Maintain The Occupations (CMDO's) *Slogans To Be Spread By Every Means*. People "creating their own lives" was an all encompassing force that snowballed to engulf all of France in a general strike. But this tendency did not take the initiative to destroy it's enemies and constitute its own power. "Crush The Power Of The Unions" never appeared in the CMDO's *Slogans*, although the Situationists knew full well that

the union stewards were strangling the strikes by confining them to each workplace. Thus the SI ignored communism as a critical power for itself.

We are not trying to "second guess" the SI during the occupations. It is quite likely that the weaknesses of the CMDO were the weaknesses of the entire occupation movement. Rene Riesel was elected to the occupation of the Sorbonne with the sincere promise to "defend direct democracy in the Sorbonne." If the CMDO had attacked or called on the workers to attack the union cops at the factory gates, the result would likely have been the same.

What we reproach the SI for is not seeing this weakness in their later discussions. *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* saw the strength of the spontaneous rejection of all parts of this society but did not see weakness of the self-managementism, democratism, subjectivism, and so-on of the movement's radical edge. It mentions weakness in the movement, but only a sort of quantitative weakness. There was not enough self-management; workers did not get the train moving again, did not distribute goods autonomously, etc. There was not enough good theory although the CMDO posters were everywhere.

The CMDO's call for "All Power To The Workers Councils" is the ultimate expression of its councilist/democratic ideology - if the masses were acting in an active communist manner, they probably would have used democratic councils to decide their course. But to allot all power to "the councils" when the majority is not acting is simply giving the only legitimate power to glorified passivity. Lenin was actually closer to revolutionary theory when he called for "all power to the workers councils" during the Russian Revolution. He at least had a reasonable expectation that communists could have influence in the councils.

The initial revolutionary steps of May 68 were taken by various minorities taking unilateral actions; individual disrupting classes, declassé elements fighting the police in the Latin Quarter or workers in one factory or another going on wildcat strike. If minorities taking audacious action were sufficient to sink the normal routine of the university, why couldn't they do the same against the union cops who held the factory gates? These extremist elements, Enragés, situationists, or worker-student action committees, lost initiative at least when they gave their mandate to the reified myth of total direct democracy.

For communists, the proletariat must go from reacting to the present society to constituting a power in itself. Whatever the size of the communist nucleus, its general task is to increase it's power and extent. The two biggest tasks are to get more workers to participate and to weaken and destroy the remaining capitalist powers. Getting the trains going again is secondary to these goals.

(Continued From Page 2)

anger was so intense a whole group of cops retreated from her even though she was in handcuffs and hadn't moved towards them.

"It's really simple. Me and my friends shouldn't have to put up with stupid, fucked people who don't even deserve to be alive."

A woman who was a bridge between incredible people, who constantly widened her horizons, who was incredibly intelligent and insightful and willful, who loved strange little nooks - old manual typewriter - a weird little town like San Pedro, CA - an old stocking dress - a fancy stock of grey paper - a big, expensive purse for shoplifting - steel-tipped shoes to defend herself, hanging out and watching time go by as much as moving towards any set goal, who demanded the best from people and was often disappointed, who knew her life was intertwined with the condition of the world.

"Why do our lives always seem like a buddy-road movie?"

Oh pal, the incredible moment of your love, your beautiful tense back

and shoulders, and all your beautiful anger will not come together again in this world. Your life is everywhere



beyond the margins of this death-system.

To be fully alive in this present, capitalist moment is to be dangling

between survival and death. We all wind-up suspended in a different way and being torn from others is the worst pain of this moment. The connections cannot be made

when labor eats up 12 of our 18 waking hours and/or of our friends hours, when money rules every house, every item and every image. If some choose to refuse a living death, then they sometimes risk a sudden death. Death on the installment or death on the lottery. Most choices in our lives are false. Power, space, brutality and money are distributed unevenly.

Charlene loved all the sad little nooks and crannies that are left in this dry, sanitized world - all the kids games, the weird food, the funny docklands, sad sullen boys and powerful, serious girls.

The beautiful lonesomeness of the world is consuming us just as its violence and poverty destroy us. Tragedy no longer adds to life.

Do not go gently into that good night, rage, rage against the dying of the light.